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Biden secures the permanent closure of two Frankford drug houses

Frankford, DE – Attorney General Beau Biden today announced the permanent closure of two Frankford properties that have been the site of constant drug crime and violence over a period of several years. The closures are the latest in the Delaware Department of Justice Nuisance Abatement initiative, a program he expanded statewide in 2007 to identify properties where crime is allowed to continue unchecked. Delaware's Nuisance Abatement Act gives those property owners the choice to either clean up the problem voluntarily or face the Department of Justice in court.

"Properties like these hold neighborhoods prisoner with fear and apprehension. They're the bad apples that spoil the bunch. That's not what 'home' should mean for any family," Biden said. "Nuisance Abatement is a powerful tool to root out these poisonous properties from the community and create a better quality of life for law-abiding Delawareans."

On October 15, 2009 the Delaware Department of Justice filed a lawsuit against the owners of 28565 Blueberry Lane in Frankford because of severe drug nuisance activity. At a hearing last November in Sussex County Superior Court, the Department provided evidence of that activity, including an armed robbery during which shots were fired in the presence of an eight-year-old child, a stabbing, and a drive-by shooting during which bullets entered the house when a six-month-old and a two-year-old child were present. Since October, 2004 police have visited the property at least 18 times to apprehend fugitives believed to be on-site. Following the hearing, at the Department's request, Resident Judge T. Henley Graves agreed that the property presented an immediate threat to the public health, safety, and welfare and issued a temporary abatement order closing the property. Since that time, no additional instances of drug activity have been reported.

In its investigation of the Blueberry Lane property, the Department of Justice learned that another Frankford property owned by the same individuals, located at 34676 Delaware Avenue, was also the site of substantial drug activity over a period of several years. The Department then sought permanent closure of both properties in order to protect the community. That order, developed as a consent agreement with the properties' 8 owners, was signed yesterday by Judge Graves. It contains the following terms:

- Owners and residents Ronald and Vanessa Foreman must vacate the Delaware Avenue property within 30 days.
- Owners Ronald, Vanessa, and Greg Foreman are to have absolutely no contact with either property or the surrounding 2-mile radius ever again.
- The owner/occupants of both properties have relinquished any and all property rights to both properties.

- The remaining co-owners will clear both properties of all mobile homes, trailers, campers, and other structures within 90 days.
- After clearing both properties, the remaining co-owners will be permitted to sell the lands, subject to approval by the Department of Justice.
- If any owner maintains a drug nuisance anywhere else in the state, the agreement is violated and the state will seek civil penalties of a minimum of \$25,000.

“Nuisance abatement is community prosecution at work – prosecutors and investigators working side by side with residents and community leaders from the ground up to improve our neighborhoods,” Biden added. “We find a problem, and then we develop a solution. Today’s permanent closures are a powerful step in helping the residents of Frankford have the peace and security they deserve in their homes and in their neighborhoods.”

The Attorney General thanked Delaware State Police, the Governor’s Task Force, the Frankford Police Department, and residents for their active involvement in identifying and investigating these properties. He also recognized State Senator George Bunting and State Representative John Atkins for their support and cooperation in the case.

Representative Atkins, who represents the community affected by these nuisance properties, said that residents' persistence and input was key in bringing these issues to light. "Let this be a warning that we are not going to tolerate these illegal activities around the district," said Rep. Atkins, D-Millsboro. "I am glad that our residents had the courage and diligence to report these problems and show pride in their community. I am proud to support Attorney General Biden in his efforts and was proud to support the legislation we passed to clean up our neighborhoods and rid them of nuisance properties and drug havens."

In August, 2007 Biden launched a statewide effort to combat crime in Delaware under the state’s Drug Nuisance and Social Vices Abatement Act. Under the Nuisance Abatement Act, enforcement actions can take a variety of forms, including closure of a property. The Delaware Department of Justice identifies nuisance properties up and down Delaware through its own investigations and in cooperation with state and local police agencies, local authorities, civic associations, and neighborhood residents. Through its enforcement actions, the Department gives property owners the choice of voluntarily cooperating to clean up the illegal activity, or defending themselves in court and being forced to clean up the crime by court order. To date 15 properties have been shut down, over 125 nuisances have been eliminated, and over 300 properties are on the program’s “watch list.”

For more information on the temporary abatement issued in October, please visit <http://www.attorneygeneral.delaware.gov/media/releases/2009/drughaven.pdf>.

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